

O 171038Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1498
INFO ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
USPACOM HONOLULU HI
CIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC
DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 000271

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP, DS
NSC FOR E.PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINS](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: INDONESIAN ELECTIONS EXPECTED TO BE LARGELY
PEACEFUL

REF: A. JAKARTA 00223
[1](#)B. JAKARTA 00196
[1](#)C. SURABAYA 10
[1](#)D. 08 SURABAYA 65

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate General
Surabaya and Consulate Medan.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia's 2009 national elections are
expected to be largely peaceful. A tradition of peaceful
elections, government-opposition relations that are not
strained and effective law enforcement seem to be working to
keep the campaign calm. There are some wildcards: Aceh
Province, for example, is one place where election violence
is a real concern. With over 175 million people expected to
vote in this sprawling country, the GOI is working overtime
to smooth out possible technical electoral glitches which
might spark tensions. END SUMMARY.

EXPECTATIONS ARE FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

[1](#)3. (C) Most observers believe that Indonesia's upcoming
legislative and presidential elections will move forward
peacefully. (Note: The national legislative elections take
place on April 9 and the presidential election takes place in
July. If needed, the presidential election runoff will take
place in September.) In recent meetings with Pol/C, various
observers remarked that taken as a whole the elections will
probably be quite calm. For example:

--Theo Sambuaga, a senior MP for the Golkar Party, told Pol/C
on February 13 that "we have a tradition of peaceful
elections in Indonesia and I would be surprised if there was
much violence or instability."

--Meanwhile, Dr. Zulkieflimansyah, an MP for the
Islamic-oriented Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), told Pol/C
on February 17 that "save for Aceh, I do not see any areas or
likely problems."

FACTORS UNDERPINNING THE POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

[1](#)4. (C) The Indonesian government is working hard to prevent
any turbulence. One factor that seems to be helping the
situation is that the Indonesian government under President
Yudhoyono and the major opposition party, the Indonesian
Party of Democratic Struggle (PDIP) under former president
Megawati, do not have strained relations. While the GOI and
the opposition have their differences, there seems to be some
mutual respect shared by the two sides. The government
allows its opponents to operate largely free of interference.
Meanwhile, the opposition has not tried to run a vociferous,
hard-line "throw the rascals out" campaign of the sort seen
in other developing countries. Mainstream Islamic-oriented
parties also act in a largely restrained manner.

15. (SBU) Other positive factors: Late last year, the GOI required political parties to sign a code of conduct eschewing violence and prohibiting members from engaging in acts such as tearing down opponents' campaign banners (an activity that can lead to a spike in tensions). Although unevenly enforced, this pact seems to have at least helped keep political actors on good behavior in most of the nation. NGO's are also helping out. Various NGO's are running conflict prevention programs throughout Indonesia, particularly in sensitive regions. USG-funded organizations work hard to educate political parties and voters, for example.

16. (SBU) The national Election Commission (KPU) also is moving forward on educating the public, and to solve technical problems involving voter lists and ballots. A large number of voters remain unregistered because of various problems, which include the simple math of registering the over 175 million people expected to vote. The KPU may decide to allow registration until just before the elections which would allow more voters to cast their ballots. A bigger problem is Indonesia's very strict voting rules, which can lead to confusion and wasted votes. A recent KPU "test" election in East Java resulted in roughly 60% of the votes being tossed out due to such factors as not using the prescribed tick mark on the ballot. KPU recently decided to be more flexible.

SECURITY PREPARATIONS

7 (C) Security preparations are well under way. As in 2004 (when national elections last took place), thousands of police and civilian security guards will be deployed to polling stations. Police are running simulation exercises to prepare for possible violence. In the 2004 elections, the GOI assigned 38,000 Indonesian troops to assist police and thousands will be deployed this time around. President Yudhoyono has met with police and military leaders, and warned them to stay neutral in the elections and to be ready to prevent any problems.

CONCERNS ABOUT SOME REGIONS

18. (C) All that said, there are some regions of concern. Aceh is one such place given its history of conflict and recent transition toward peace under the terms of the 2005 peace accord. This year, there have been some isolated incidents of politically motivated violence and concerns re further turbulence (Reftel A). Aceh is somewhat anomalous--it is the only area to have its own local parties (per the peace accord) and there are six such parties in addition to the 38 national parties. The GOI is paying close attention to stopping political violence in Aceh. President Yudhoyono has underscored this point in recent speeches and the GOI has dispatched a high-level team to Aceh to look into recent violence. Observers hope that these steps, coupled with domestic and international observers, will help reduce violence.

19. (C) Other sites of special interest include:

--In North Maluku and in South Sulawesi, ethnicity was a factor in sparking violent demonstrations in 2007-2008 over contested gubernatorial elections (Reftel D). The Maluku region, in particular, has a history of ethno-religious turbulence.

--The Papua region is restive, with many Papuans distrustful of Jakarta. It is quite possible that there could be some rallies, etc., that require police action to break up.

--In Medan, North Sumatra, an old sectarian feud with economic underpinnings concerning demands by one ethnic group to form a separate province flared into a violent protest in Parliament recently, resulting in one death (Reftel B). The GOI has acted quickly and there have been arrests.

110. (C) Other potential triggers for violence are confusing

new regulations and a lack of voter awareness. A recent Constitutional Court ruling that allows voters to choose legislative candidates directly has increased intra-party competition which may raise tension in some regions. Especially in close races, KPU administrative difficulties could possibly overwhelm dispute resolution mechanisms and lead to prolonged disputes which could spark electoral violence.

SO FAR, SO GOOD

¶11. (C) There was minimal violence during the 2004 general elections. And thus far, the campaign for the legislative election in April has been quite peaceful, save for some incidents in Aceh. The campaign should heat up in the next several weeks, especially with Indonesian campaign laws allowing bigger rallies, etc., closer to the date of the election. As noted, the GOI seems to be aware of the possibility of problems and has placed security force assets at the ready to handle any developing situation. Our guess is that the overall situation should proceed quite peacefully, though there will no doubt be some isolated incidents. If things hold up, the formalities of Indonesian democracy will continue to be matched by a spirit conducive to broad political and societal participation in the healthiest sense.

HUME